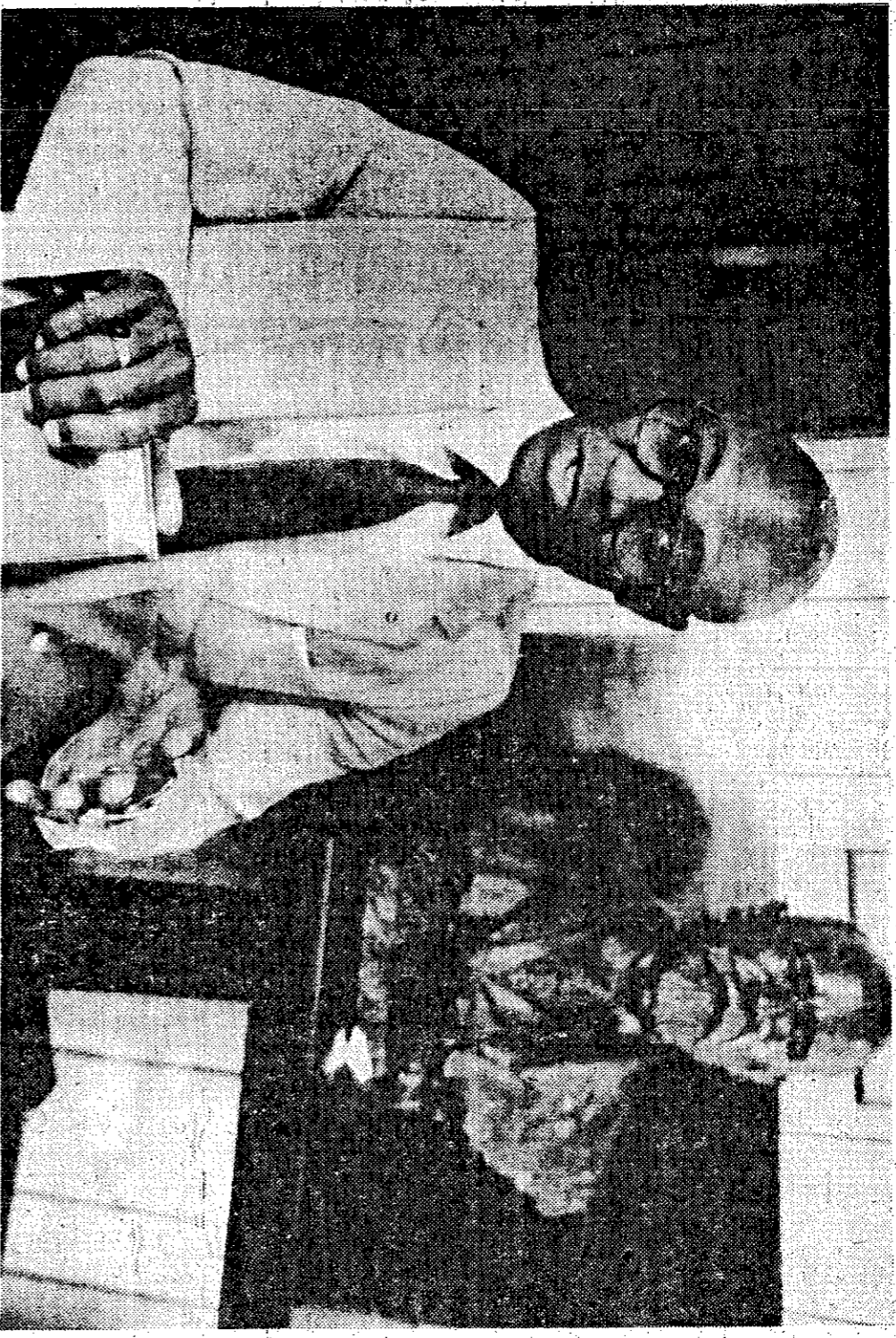


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Philadelphia Inquirer / MICHAEL VIOLA

Collins and a bust of the reformer; George's idea of the single tax on land captured the imagination of thousands

"There came to me a thought, a vision, a call," George wrote, in which the reasons for poverty and economic problems were revealed to him.

A reformer's message is their sacred trust

By Craig Stock
Inquirer Staff Writer

A century ago, Philadelphia had no more prominent native son than Henry George, whose book *Progress and Poverty* had sold two million copies and whose ideas on economics and tax reform created a vibrant political party and an enthusiastic following of millions worldwide.

But that was 100 years ago. This evening, on the 144th anniversary of George's birth, perhaps 50 people are expected to gather for a quiet celebration in the same brick rowhouse on 10th Street near Lombard Street where he was born.

Although the world has pretty much passed by Henry George and his ideas, the mood will be upbeat at tonight's party. The house at 413 S. 10th St., now a combination schoolhouse and shrine, has just been added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Even more exciting for the little band of true believers who still teach George's economic ideas are some recent signs that the world is once again taking notice of those ideas, said George L. Collins, director of the Henry George School.

Henry George left his hometown as a teenager to work on a cargo ship. He later worked as a printer, gold prospector and journalist. He knew poverty intimately and once begged a stranger for \$5 to buy food for his pregnant

wife. The stranger gave him the money.

"If he had not," George later wrote, "I think I was desperate enough to have killed him."

He studied economics and philosophy and began writing. While walking down a crowded city street, "there came to me a thought, a vision, a call," George was to write, in which the reasons for poverty and economic problems were revealed to him.

The whole problem, he believed, as do his followers today, was that land was scarce and that those who owned land gained unfairly by society's growth and by public expenditures on such amenities as roads and sewer systems. Speculators could get rich merely by buying land and holding onto it, without ever doing any productive work, George said. Businessmen, farmers and workers, those groups who George saw as the real producers in society, were hampered by the high costs of land and by the nonuse or underuse of land held by speculators.

His solution, a panacea for all economic woes, was a single, huge tax on land. There would be no tax on income, on buildings or other improvements put on land or on crops grown on the land because such taxes discouraged production.

The single tax should be large enough to soak up all the rental value of the land, George wrote. Then the only reason to hold land would be to use it for some productive



George's birthplace at 413 S. 10th St.

purpose — a factory or business, a farm or a home. Speculators would no longer buy land and hold it in hopes of selling for a larger sum later because the cost of holding on to it would be prohibitive.

During the industrial revolution of the 1880s, in the United States and other countries where enormous wealth and wretched poverty existed side-by-side, George's ideas had great appeal. He became a sensation and a Single Tax Party was formed to push for George's ideas.

George ran for mayor of New York City in 1886, beating a rising young politician named Theodore Roosevelt but losing to the candidate of the Tammany political machine. He died in 1897, in the middle of his second

(See GEORGE on 18-C)

***They hold
a message
from the past***

GEORGE, from 13-C
campaign for mayor.

With his death, the Single Tax movement lost its driving force. Although the Single Taxers continued to field presidential candidates as late as 1924, the movement faded quickly. In the economics profession, George is regarded today as "almost-Messiah, semitrackpot and disturbing questioner of the morality of the world," wrote Robert L. Heilbroner, a leading economic historian.

Even the loyal single Taxer George Collins concedes that almost no one, "apart from those of us who are devotees of the idea," seriously advocates the Georgist doctrine these days.

Collins recognizes that Americans love of home ownership and their suspicion of taxes makes the selling of George's ideas difficult these days.

But Collins, 48, is a patient man. He quotes Leo Tolstoy, the Russian

writer and George admirer, who said, "People do not argue with the teaching of George; they simply do not know it. He who becomes acquainted with it cannot but agree."

An immigrant from Jamaica, Col-

osophy since he attended a class in New York City more than 20 years ago. The school attracts about 100 students a year for its 10-week classes, for which it charges \$25 to cover

Although enrollment in the school has not soared in recent years, Collins finds encouraging signs. "I am very pleased to say that im-

pression of him and the reaction to him is slowly but very perceptibly changing into one in which his views are getting some attention," Collins said in a voice but full of

conviction.

Fortune magazine featured a story about how five Pennsylvania cities have begun levying higher property tax rates on land than on buildings or other improvements on the land.

The notion is now practiced in Pittsburg, Scranton, Harrisburg, McKeesport and New Castle. Although the property-tax differential is at best a watered-down version of the original plan.

sion of George's ideas, Collins sees it as a warm embrace of Georgist philosophy.

businessmen ought to embrace and

"The New York Times, in an editorial," but how to the whole community," development are not only lasting, more jobs and increasingly compact promote, the benefits in the form of

at earlier this year, suggested the same reform in property taxes for New York City. The notion of a higher tax on land than on other property has been put

before the Philadelphia City Council, Collins said, but has not made it out of committee.

general," Collins said. "I have no doubt that it is going to reappear in

City Council very soon." Although he is pleased to see modified versions of Henry George's ideas put into practice, Collins believes only a complete conversion to a sin-

gle tax will ultimately "liberate our economy from the strictures it suffers from and the periodic declines of recessions and disruptions of inflation."

Henry George cigars: The manufacturer's message was that they were wrapped in a single foil



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